



United States Department of Agriculture

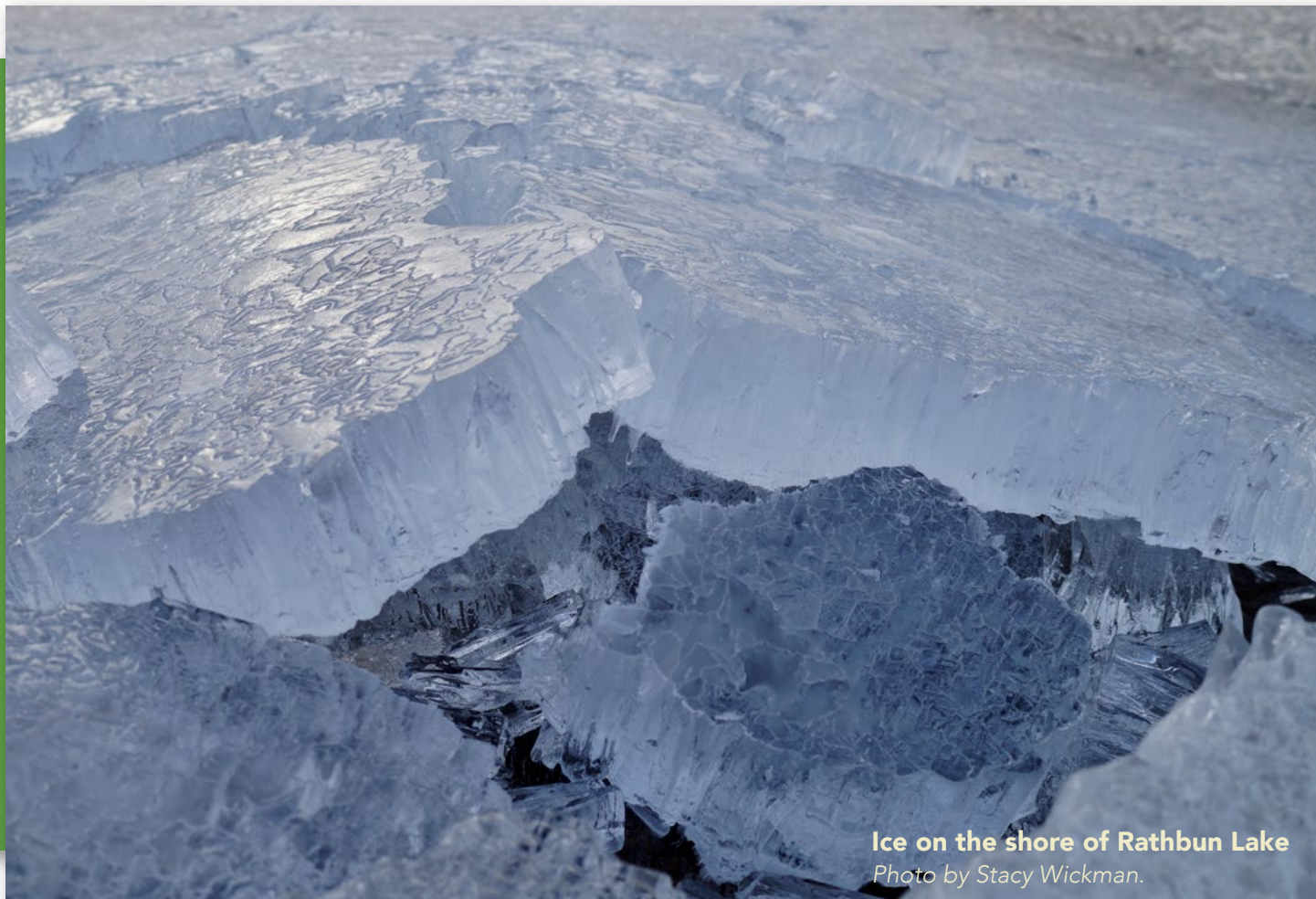
IOWA CURRENT **DEVELOPMENTS**

DECEMBER 2016/JANUARY 2017

**NEW LEADERS IN
SIOUX CITY & WEST UNION**

**SOIL HEALTH KIT TARGETS
EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNERS**

NATURAL RESOURCES
CONSERVATION SERVICE
www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov



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On the cover: Iowa NRCS Toolkit Coordinator Stacy Wickman took a picture of a winter solstice sunset at Rathbun Lake on Dec. 20, 2016. To view more of Stacy's pictures, visit <https://www.viewbug.com/member/SWick>.

a **Message** from the **State Conservationist**



Kurt Simon,
State Conservationist

Change On the Horizon, Mission Stays the Same

This month marks the beginning of a new Administration, including a new Secretary of Agriculture, NRCS Chief and members of the Chief's staff. And in the not too distant future Congress will be actively working towards a new Farm Bill. It's been nearly a decade since we, as an agency, experienced this much change in such a short time frame.

We all process change differently. Some of us thrive under constant change; others work hard to avoid it. During this time it will be important for us to be sensitive to these differences, and do our best to respond to new opportunities with optimism and encouragement.

In fact, Chief Weller recently shared his words of encouragement with the State Conservationists during a national VTC. Here are a few of his comments:

"NRCS is poised for great things."

"It's your time to shine."

"It's your moment and you should all 'bear hug it'."

"I'm optimistic about our unlimited future because of our leaders at all levels which demonstrate initiative and vision."

Overall, Chief Weller reinforced the importance of NRCS and our role in empowering landowners and communities to conserve our nation's natural resources and grow economic stability. He closed by emphasizing how much our country needs NRCS, including his own daughters, and I can't think of a higher compliment.

IOWA CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Current Developments is a product of the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service in Des Moines, Iowa, published bimonthly by the Iowa NRCS Public Affairs Staff in cooperation with NRCS and partner agency employees from across the state.

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS STORIES AND PHOTOS

Please submit your Current Developments story ideas and photos to State Public Affairs Specialist Laura Crowell at laura.crowell@ia.usda.gov. Past issues can be found at www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/ia/people/employees/?cid=nrcs142p2_008273



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SAFETY REMINDER: OPERATORS OF GOVERNMENT VEHICLES

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Where state and local laws do not prohibit the use of mobile telephones, USDA strongly discourages the use of hand-held wireless telephones by a driver while operating motor vehicles owned or leased by the Government. Even the use of "hand free" equipment is strongly discouraged.

Texting or text messaging means reading from or entering data into any hand held or other electronic device (including, but not limited to, cell phones, navigational tools, laptop computers or other electronic devices), including for the purpose of Short Message Service (SMS) texting, e-mailing, instant messaging, obtaining navigational information or engaging in any other form of electronic data retrieval or electronic data communication.

The term does not include the use of a cell phone or other electronic device for the limited purpose of entering a telephone number to make an outgoing call or answer an incoming call, unless this practice is prohibited by state or local law. The term also does not include glancing at or listening to a navigational device that is secured in a commercially designed



holder affixed to the vehicle, provided that the destination and route are programmed into the device either before driving or while stopped in a location off the roadway where it is safe and legal to remain stationary.

If a telephone call is necessary, the driver shall pull safely to the side of the road, or a parking area and then initiate the call.

Learn More about Text Messaging While Driving at <https://www.ocio.usda.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2012/DR5400-007.pdf>.



BACK IN THE DAY

Mid 1970s



Submitted by Bill Mozingo:

Audubon County Soil and Water Conservation

District Board Meeting, celebrating birthday for former commissioner Willie Esbeck.

Left to Right: Commissioner Jim Freidrichson; Willie Esbeck; SCS Soil Conservation Technician Bud McCune; SCS Soil Conservationist Marvin Brown; Commissioner Bill Campbell; Commissioner Virgil Sorenson; State Aid Harold Somers; and Commissioner Harvey Sornson.

CAN'T GET ENOUGH: JENSEN, WHITE RETURN TO ENGINEERING

Retired Iowa NRCS engineers Mark Jensen and Lee White are back in the State Office part-time, assisting the Engineering staff with special projects.

Jensen spent more than 15 years, beginning in 1993 and retiring in 2008, as the State Engineer. Altogether, he worked for NRCS for more than 39 years.

Jensen has worked part-time for the engineering staff through agreements during portions of the past 6 years. Some of the major projects he has worked on include: developing the small grassed waterway design procedure and the revised terrace spacing tables in the Engineering Field Handbook. He assisted in the completion of an engineering workload analysis and the revision of all Iowa Amendments to the National Engineering Manual.



During the next contract period, which extends through December 2018, he will be assisting with developing O&M Plans for conservation practices; reviewing and updating conservation practice standards and statements of work; revising out-of-date amendments to the Engineering Field Handbook; reviewing designs, plans, and specifications for specific projects; provide training; and assisting in the interpretation of policy for engineering applications.

White has worked part-time for the engineering staff through agreements for portions of the past 3 years. He has primarily been involved with the implementation of the Dam Watch program within Iowa, which is a web-based application developed for NRCS by UEngineering Solutions Corporation (USES) to assist watershed project sponsors to monitor and manage NRCS-assisted dams.



Local watershed sponsors have constructed almost 12,000 dams across the nation with NRCS assistance. Over 1,600 of these dams are located in Iowa. This tool provides real-time monitoring of rainfall, snowmelt, stream flow and seismic events that could pose threats to dam safety. In 2015, six rainfall events exceeding 5.5 inches were recorded within Iowa. These events affected 303 dams in 19 counties. Fortunately, most of the heavy rainfall took place late in the growing year when vegetation and crops were well established. However, several dams did sustain some damage. Warnings were automatically issued to project sponsors even before the rain had stopped. Lee was involved with Dam Watch prior to his retirement in 2013, and continues to add data and files to the program. Dam Watch is intended to be a one-stop location for all items related to each dam, including As Built plans, Operation and Maintenance Agreements and Plans, Dam Inventory information, Watershed Plans, and O & M inspections.

EMPLOYEE
SPOTLIGHT

**Shawn
Dettmann**

Title: Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations, West Union

College Education:

» Bachelor of Science: Agricultural Studies - Farm Operations, 1987, Iowa State University

After more than 20 years as the Area Resource Conservationist for NRCS in Fairfield, Shawn recently started a new endeavor in West Union overseeing operations for 18 counties in northeast Iowa.

Shawn was a Wetland Restoration Specialist in Des Moines in 1995-96, and served as the District Conservationist in Wapello from June 1991 through September 1995.

Shawn will celebrate his 25th wedding anniversary with Detra this September. Together, they have two children. Their son, Makena, is a senior at Coe College in Cedar Rapids where he is majoring in Physics, Math and Computer Science. Their daughter, Hannah, is a freshman at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minn., where she is studying Computer Science and Environmental Studies.

Shawn and Detra enjoy hiking and kayaking.



Shawn Dettmann

EMPLOYEE
SPOTLIGHT

**Luis
Cruz-Arroyo**

Title: Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations, Sioux City

College Education:

» Bachelor of Science: Animal Science, 2006, University of Puerto Rico

Luis comes to Iowa after serving as Area Resource Conservationist in the west area of Alabama since 2013. He recently was selected as Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations in Sioux City.

He began his NRCS career as a Soil Conservationist in Baldwin County, Alabama, and continued his career as a District Conservationist in different work units in Alabama.

Luis is in the process of moving to Iowa with his wife, Erika, and his daughter, Olivia.



Luis Cruz-Arroyo

Nabbing Nitrates Before Water Leaves the Farm: Working Wetlands

M&M Divide RC&D received a Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) from NRCS to produce a series of videos to educate landowners and producers on practices that can assist in solving the nutrient water quality issues in Iowa's Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI) target areas: North Raccoon River, Boone River, Maquoketa River, and Cedar River.

The series - entitled "Nabbing Nitrates before water leaves the farm" - consists of 4 animated videos which illustrate what happens below the ground to remove nitrates when the following conservation practices are implemented: Conservation Drainage, Riparian Forest Buffers, Working Wetlands, and Bioreactors.



PARTNERSHIP DAY: NRCS SUPPORTS STATE, DISTRICT PARTNERS

Forty soil and water conservation district commissioners and assistant commissioners from 27 districts attended the annual Partnership Day at the State Capitol in Des Moines, Jan. 17, to speak with their local legislators about conservation issues.

NRCS, along with a handful of other conservation partners such as Iowa Learning Farms, the Land Improvement Contractors of America, and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, joined the SWCDs in displaying conservation materials.

Lt. Governor Kim Reynolds toured the Capitol rotunda, along with Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey, Deputy Secretary Mike Naig, Iowa NRCS State Conservationist Kurt Simon, Iowa DNR Director Chuck Gipp, and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Director John Lawrence.

Conservation Districts of Iowa Executive Director Clare Lindahl, who coordinated the day's activities, estimates commissioners spoke with about 50 legislators.



Top: Public Affairs Specialist Jason Johnson demonstrates a tabletop rainfall simulator for Lt. Governor Kim Reynolds and State Conservationist Kurt Simon (center) during Partnership Day at the State Capitol in Des Moines on Jan. 17. **Bottom:** A third floor view of Partnership Day.

SOIL HEALTH KITS: NRCS ASSEMBLES EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

*Submitted by Judy Martinson,
Resource Conservationist*

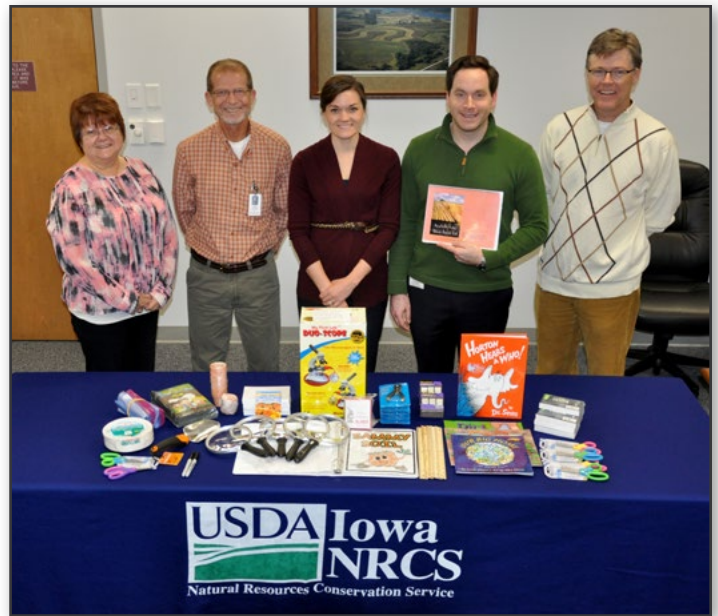
Iowa NRCS rolled out a new Soil Health Kit, developed by Iowa Earth Team volunteers, on Nov. 23, 2016.

The project idea was sparked by an Iowa Conservation Education Coalition (ICEC) workshop Marty Adkins, Assistant State Conservationist - Partnerships, attended in 2015. ICEC encouraged attendees to develop conservation and environmental education materials that would meet the new Iowa science teaching standards. Students in Iowa are moving away from learning isolated subjects to learning through the integration of multiple concepts using the scientific method and a hands-on discovery process.

A month later, Marty received an email inquiring about volunteer opportunities for Joe and Bridgette Uhlemann. As it turned out - NRCS was the only organization that responded to Joe's volunteer inquiries! Marty suggested developing soil health materials that incorporated the new Iowa standards. Their target audience: lower elementary school children. The Uhlemanns loved the idea!

Joe and Bridgette were supported in this project by a team that included Craig Edmondson, a science education consultant for Heartland Area Education Agency (AEA). Craig introduced the concept of "Foss kits", individual kits that provide all the materials and equipment needed to teach a unit on a particular subject. In addition to Marty, Rick Bednarek, Iowa State Soil Scientist, and Judy Martinson, a Resource Conservationist on the Partnership team, were brought in as advisory members of project team. Under their guidance, Bridgette and Joe developed lesson plans and supporting information, including an original story, *Barry and his Buddies Munch Better Soil*.

In the story, Barry introduces children to major soil organisms that impact the quality of soil health. Judy added additional science to the storyline and new features, including vocabulary and links to children's soils activities and projects. Renae Nicholson, a former Iowa NRCS employee with a Master's



L to R: Judy Martinson (NRCS), Craig Edmondson (Heartland AEA), Bridgette & Joe Uhlemann, and Marty Adkins (NRCS). Not pictured: Angie Hynek & Rick Bednarek (NRCS).

Degree in Creative Writing, provided early editing and formatting assistance. Angie Hynek, a talented illustrator, contributed her artwork as an Earth Team volunteer for the project. Angie's characterizations really brought the story characters to life! Jason Johnson, Public Affairs Specialist, provided some final editing of the storyline and several teachers also vetted the story throughout the development process.

Cindy Slagle, Administrative Assistant, along with Sophia Douglas and Megan Hosford, Elyon contract employees, volunteered to assemble the kits. Craig secured the AEA services to professionally publish the original story and find homes for the kits.

Heartland, Great Prairie, Keystone, Mississippi Bend and AEA 267 each agreed to take ownership of two of the Foss kits. Each kit contains a microscope, 4 children's books, lesson plans and supplies, and the original story, *Barry and his Buddies Much Better Soil*.

Today, as a result of the hard work and dedication of Earth Team volunteers, teachers and other conservation professionals may check out the kits and thus promote Iowa conservation while meeting the goals of the new Iowa teaching standards.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS WRITING TIP:

3 RULES FOR PRODUCING CONSISTENT CONTENT

Here are three tips that will help you produce clean, clear writing regardless of topic, intent, and audience.

1. Insert or Omit Hyphens as Needed

Adjectival phrases that precede a noun, such as “free range” before chicken, generally take hyphens, though if the phrase is a standing phrase documented in dictionaries (as is “high school”), leave the hyphen out when using the phrase to modify a noun (“high school student”). Adverbial phrases such as “newly discovered” never take hyphens, but those with flat adverbs (those lacking the -ly ending), such as “well earned,” always do before (but not after) a noun.

Most prefixes are attached directly to the root word (antiwar, cosponsor, deactivate, neoconservative, preapproved, reorganize, and so on), though there are exceptions (for example, when the root word is a proper name or when the first letter of the prefix is an i and the first letter of the root word is, too). When in doubt, look it up. When not in doubt, look it up anyway.

A few compounds remain hyphenated. (Light-year and mind-set are two of the most common.) Learn these exceptions to the rule that compound nouns are either open or closed.

2. Minimize Jargon

When using specialized language, make sure that all content producers in your organization are in line with the definition and application of the terminology (and, again, publicize within the organization and document it) and that external consumers of your content understand it, too. But take care not to burden the reader with a heavy concentration of jargon; carefully manage a balance of authoritative language with clarity.



Also, avoid using acronyms and initialisms unless readers are familiar with them or they are introduced in every document, on every web page, or in every email message—spelled out on first reference, followed by the parenthesized abbreviation.

If feasible, provide a glossary of terms and abbreviations.

3. Avoid Adjective Stacks

Avoid strings of adjectives that modify nouns; for example, reword “information technology risk management mitigation efforts” to “efforts to mitigate risks in managing information technology.”

Grassland Specialist

New Leader
with New Ideas

By Jeff Matthias, State Grassland Specialist



Jeff Matthias

Last October, I started my new position as the State Grassland Specialist for Iowa. In this position, my primary duties will be working on grazing lands in the state.

After being in this position for a few months, I have an idea

of where to start with grazing land education for our staff: increase knowledge of grazing, increase knowledge of forages, and sharing of information amongst staff.

Some of the ideas I am bringing to the position with me include: making a spreadsheet to complete Grazier's Arithmetic, updating the forage balance worksheet to include soils changes and grazing cover crops, and improving the readability of fencing specifications and job sheets.

If anyone has suggestions of other pasture-related conservation practices and tools needing updated or improved, please let me know.

As part of my position, I am available to teach area and field offices about pasture planning. This is one area I really enjoy, working with planners to become better planners for grazing systems. I am available to assist all staff wanting to learn more about planning for pasture systems.



Changes In IOWA NRCS PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
Hammitt, Gary	Soil Conservationist	New Hire	10/30/16	Humboldt
Pruett, Kindra	Soil Conservation Technician	Name Change	10/30/16	Wapello
Harris, Aris	Soil Conservationist	Promotion	10/30/16	Council Bluffs
Dittmer, Heidi	Soil Conservationist	New Hire	11/13/16	Adel
Mahoney, Dan	Soil Conservation Technician	New Hire	11/13/16	Iowa City
Anderson, Sarah	Area Engineer	Reassignment	11/13/16	Ankeny
Lahn, James	District Conservationist	Resignation	11/13/16	LeMars
Bisinger, Justin	Soil Conservation Technician	New Hire	11/27/16	DeWitt
Mohn, Daniel	Soil Conservation Technician	Promotion	11/27/16	Decorah
Van Waus, Tara	Soil Conservation Technician	Promotion	11/27/16	Marshalltown
Yaddof, Dexter	Soil Conservationist	Promotion	11/27/16	Osceola
Gertsma, James	State Wetland Specialist	Realignment	11/27/16	Sioux City
Schenck, Lara	Soil Conservationist	Resignation	12/9/16	Corning
Beske, Jessica	Soil Conservationist	New Hire	12/11/16	Charles City
Barnes, Jeremy	Soil Conservationist	Student Conversion	12/11/16	Atlantic
Waechter, Megan	Soil Conservationist	Promotion	12/11/16	Waukon

Changes In IDALS-DSC PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
Roed, Ben	Soil Conservation Technician	New Hire	11/29/16	Taylor SWCD
Spicer, Tarrita	Administrative Assistant for DSCWQ Director	Resignation	12/15/16	Des Moines
Stover, Stacy	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	12/16/16	Van Buren SWCD
Miller, Kathy	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	12/27/16	Woodbury SWCD
Saunders, Rhonda	Conservation Assistant	Retired	12/29/16	Benton SWCD
Meek, Beth	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	12/30/16	Ringgold SWCD